

## **Los Angeles Times: Santa Barbara working to reactivate mothballed desalination plant**

By, AMANDA COVARRUBIAS, March 3, 2015

California's four-year drought created the statewide mantra: "Conserve, conserve, conserve." But this coastal city can soon add another word to its water-related lexicon: desalinate.

Santa Barbara owns a mothballed plant — built more than 20 years ago during another severe drought — that can turn seawater into drinking water. But it was never used beyond a tryout phase before steady rain began falling again. Now, officials are working to press the Charles E. Meyer Desalination Facility back into service as the city's reservoirs continue to diminish.

The city plans to spend up to \$40 million to modernize and reactivate the plant, which was closed in 1992 when the last drought ended. It is among a number of desalting projects being considered along the California coast, including in Huntington Beach and the Monterey Peninsula.

In Cambria, a hybrid desalination plant that began operating in November treats brackish water to make it drinkable. And the nation's largest desalination plant is being built in Carlsbad for \$954 million

Although it may seem natural to think the Pacific Ocean could be the answer to California's water crisis, experts say a stampede toward desalination is unlikely.

"It has two big disadvantages: It's really expensive and it's energy-intensive," said Henry Vaux Jr., a UC Berkeley professor emeritus of resource economics who contributed to a 2008 National Research Council report on desalination.

It could also put elected leaders in the unenviable position of sticking customers with expensive desalination bills should stormy weather return.

"Given the time it takes to come up with a plant, including permitting and construction, the drought will probably be over by the time it's built," said Heather Cooley, water program director of the Pacific Institute, a nonprofit that conducts research on natural resources.

That's what happened in Santa Barbara in the early 1990s, when officials began constructing the \$35-million plant. At that time, communities were so desperate for water, Ventura even floated the notion of towing icebergs down the coast from Alaska to provide some relief. State experts said the idea had been studied and quickly discarded.

Heavy rains came before Santa Barbara's desalination plant was finished nine months later, and it was never used beyond the test phase. But the city kept up its maintenance schedule over the last two decades, with the idea that it could be brought online again in another drought.

That time arrived last September when the city's main reservoir, Lake Cachuma, fell to less than 30% capacity and the city tightened restrictions on customers' water use to encourage conservation. The City Council voted unanimously that month to pursue reopening the plant in the fall of 2016.

"The council policy was to go to desalination as an absolutely last resort, and this is a last resort," Santa Barbara Mayor Helene Schneider said in an interview. "The exceptional drought has accelerated this year, and we need to be ready and have desal online when we need it."

If the plant is reactivated next year, it would produce enough water to make up about 30% of Santa Barbara's demand, said Joshua Haggmark, the interim water resources manager.

Santa Barbara already reduced its water usage by 24% in January, compared to the same month in a normal year, Haggmark said. If current conditions persist, the city will probably ramp up its water restrictions to the next level, including a possible moratorium on watering lawns, he said.

"People have really stepped up to the plate," Haggmark said, adding that strong conservation numbers do not lessen the necessity for desalination. "This is not a knee-jerk response."

Desalinated water will cost about a third more than Santa Barbara's imported water because on top of the estimated \$40 million it could take to open the plant, it could cost \$5.2 million a year to keep it running.

That means water users could see a significant increase in their water bills this summer if the city moves forward. Monthly bills could increase from \$78 to \$108 for an average household using 1,200 cubic feet. A cubic foot equals about 7.5 gallons.

The Santa Barbara plant will produce fresh water through reverse osmosis, an energy-intensive process that separates salts and contaminants from seawater by forcing it through sand filters and tightly coiled synthetic membranes. The salt is returned to the ocean as brine.

But environmentalists complain that the Santa Barbara plant will damage the marine environment by sucking microorganisms, fish eggs and plankton, which form a critical part of the food chain, into water intake pipes in the open ocean.

They would rather see intake pipes placed under the ocean floor, which they said would be less harmful to aquatic life.

The city has agreed to study alternative methods for taking in ocean water, but it is not required under various state permits to change anything.

"We don't think desalination is a smart solution to the drought," said Kira Redmond, executive director of Santa Barbara Channelkeeper. "But if they're going to do it, we're asking them to operate it in the most environmentally sound way possible, using modern technology."

Redmond said alternatives, such as capturing storm water and recycling wastewater, should be tried first.

"We completely disagree that they've exhausted all their other options," Redmond said. "We don't agree that it's a last resort."

<http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-santa-barbara-desal-20150303-story.html>

## **AP: Pilot program to slow speed of cargo ships in Santa Barbara Channel reduces pollution**

March 03, 2015 - 5:21 pm

SANTA BARBARA, California — A pilot program that had cargo ships slow down in the Santa Barbara Channel appears to be working.

Government and nonprofit groups announced Tuesday that last year's program prevented tons of air pollutants from being released by ship engines.

From July through November, seven shipping firms were paid \$2,500 a trip to reduce ship speeds through the channel to 12 knots from the previous 14 knots to 18 knots.

The idea was to reduce air pollution and also increase protection for endangered whales that use the channel.

Authorities say over 27 trips, the program reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 500 metric tons and nitrogen oxide emissions by 16 tons.

The trial was modeled after successful slow-down programs at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. <http://www.dailyjournal.net/view/story/450b5383c0f746be815af8d402dcc137/CA--Ship-Speed-Study/>

## **Lompoc Record: County launches air-friendly mulch program**

March 03, 2015 5:38 pm • Harold Pierce

Responding to an overwhelming number of complaints about smoke pollution in the Santa Ynez Valley, county fire officials are rolling out a wood-chipping program as an alternative to permitted backyard burns.

The pilot program provides property owners with valid Residential Dry Vegetation Burning permits an alternative to burning tree trimmings and yard waste, according to Santa Barbara County Fire Department Capt. David Sadecki.

The service comes free of charge beyond the \$50 permit fee, and the mulch can either be used by the property owners as mulch, which reduces fire danger, or hauled away.

"We are developing this program in response to complaints we have received about smoke and poor air quality in the Santa Ynez Valley as a result of permit burning," Santa Barbara County Fire Chief Eric Peterson said. "The concept is to reduce the smoke from back-yard burns by chipping the vegetation, rather than burning it."

Complaints about smoke inhalation came to a head in January when fire officials mistakenly notified permit holders — there are 250 in the Santa Ynez Valley — that they could burn during a two-day period classified by air pollution officials as "marginal."

The designation means smoke cannot escape into the upper atmosphere, Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District Public Information Officer Mary Byrd said last month.

As a result, smoke swept through Solvang's village center and ash fell throughout the Valley.

County fire and air pollution officials told the Santa Ynez Valley News last month that the two agencies were reconsidering their policies concerning burn permits because of the complaints.

The Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District logged 20 complaints in a 12-day period beginning Jan. 21, Byrd said.

By comparison, air pollution officials received nine complaints from the Santa Ynez Valley during the whole year in 2014. Five were related to smoke from fires, said Engineering Division Manager Michael Goldman.

Additionally, 3rd District Santa Barbara County Supervisor Doreen Farr said she fielded “numerous calls” at her office about the poor air quality, prompting her to work towards a solution with Peterson.

“I’m happy to see this program offered to the public as another choice to rid their property of vegetation,” Farr said.

The pilot program begins April 1, and will last a year.

[http://lompocrecord.com/news/local/county-launches-air-friendly-mulch-program/article\\_b0afc93d-e151-5a96-b713-bbefcbbf0acd.html](http://lompocrecord.com/news/local/county-launches-air-friendly-mulch-program/article_b0afc93d-e151-5a96-b713-bbefcbbf0acd.html)

## **Noozhawk: Central Coast Water Authority Makes Water Purchase for Santa Barbara County Agencies**

By Giana Magnoli, 03.11.2015 6:08

The Central Coast Water Authority made a deal to buy water from the Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency for districts in Santa Barbara County, and wants to start moving that water as soon as possible.

“It’s probably clear sailing, and we’ll hopefully get finalized by the Department of Water Resources in the next few weeks,” CCWA head Ray Stokes said.

CCWA’s deal is to buy 7,500 acre-feet of water from AVEK. Santa Barbara is getting about 4,200 acre-feet of that, Montecito bought 2,500 acre-feet, Santa Ynez bought 250, acre-feet and Solvang bought 500 acre-feet, Stokes said.

Water purchases won’t be affected by the CCWA’s recent bond-rating downgrade, Stokes said.

The entire agency was downgraded by Moody’s Investors Service because the City of Morro Bay hasn’t met its State Water Project financial obligations since 2008. Every agency is required to have its revenues minus operating expenses equal 125 percent of all State Water payments, Stokes said.

“Morro Bay right now is in the process of a rate study to see if they’ll increase rates. I anticipate they will, and if they demonstrate they can meet their coverage obligations with the new rate structure, Moody’s is more likely to reconsider the rating.”

CCWA probably won’t deal with the bond market until 2016 at the earliest, to refinance outstanding bonds, Stokes said.

“I don’t really anticipate any significant impacts to us at this point because we’re not going to the bond market,” Stokes said.

The rating downgrade applies to CCWA’s \$68 million in debt service from its 2006A bonds.

[http://www.noozhawk.com/article/ccwa\\_buys\\_7500\\_acre\\_feet\\_water\\_for\\_santa\\_barbara\\_county\\_agencies](http://www.noozhawk.com/article/ccwa_buys_7500_acre_feet_water_for_santa_barbara_county_agencies)

## **KCBX Central Coast Public Radio: Santa Barbara water crisis reaches historic levels with no signs of 'Miracle March' relief**

THU MARCH 12, 2015, By RANDOL WHITE

Santa Barbara's primary water source during a normal year, Lake Cachuma, will figuratively run dry as early as October according to official estimates. This would be the first time in the project's history.

Water will still be in the lake, but there will be no new usable water, according to Joshua Haggmark, the City of Santa Barbara's Water Resources Manager.

To address the growing problem, a Stage III drought could be issued in May for Santa Barbara customers, which would move rationing from voluntary to mandatory.

Haggmark says he's never seen it this bad, and current drought statistics eclipse the drought numbers from previous dry stretches, including the area's 'drought of record' from the late 1940s and early 50s.

He says forward planning however has helped extend current supplies.

"If we continue to conserve, we feel like we have enough water right now to get us through next year," said Haggmark. "We're thinking about 2017 now and that's where desal plays a critical role. If we don't find another supply to help us out in 2017 and these conditions continue, we're looking at devastating shortages."

The desalination plant—or "desal"—Haggmark mentioned was built in the 90s, but was mothballed after years of sufficient rain totals.

The plant could start producing water again as early as the fall of 2016.

Water rates are expected to jump this July to pay for the necessary upgrades to the plant, as well as other drought-related fixes. A rate hike approval vote is scheduled for Tuesday, March 17.

<http://kcbx.org/post/santa-barbara-water-crisis-reaches-historic-levels-no-signs-miracle-march-relief>

## **Lompoc Record: County delays decision on water well moratorium**

March 17, 2015, Ryah Cooley

There will be no moratorium on new water wells in Santa Barbara County, at least for now, the Board of Supervisors decided Tuesday, despite the current drought and water reservoirs that are hitting record lows.

Instead, the board voted unanimously to review the existing ordinance and bring back possible changes at a future date.

About a dozen county residents poke about the issue, with most opposing a moratorium or other restrictive measures on well permits that they said would conflict with landowners' rights to access ground water on their property.

“When you make something discretionary what you’re implying is that you have the right to say no,” said Andy Caldwell, executive director of the Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business in Santa Barbara County. “We don’t think you can say that to someone who owns the water beneath their land.”

The county is considering the moratorium after receiving 278 applications for permits to construct new wells in 2014, according to a staff report. The number is up by nearly 300 percent from 2013, when just 101 applications were processed. Only 66 applications for new wells were processed in 2012.

The report links the increase in applications for well permits to the ongoing drought that is gripping the state.

Most of the applications for new water wells are coming from the Montecito area and are proposed to be used for irrigation, although three dozen private wells located within the Montecito Water District have failed due to increased demand for groundwater, according to district officials.

With water reservoirs such as Cachuma Lake nearly dry, ground water is an important factor for the county. Tom Fayram, deputy public works director for Santa Barbara County Water Resources, said the water levels at Cachuma Lake are the second lowest they've ever been, at about 56,850 acre feet of water. The all-time low was in 1991, when Cachuma Lake hit 25,000 acre feet.

Additionally, 2013-14 was one of the driest years on record for Santa Maria with just 5 inches of rain, according to county data. A normal rain year for Santa Maria is about 13 inches. Comparatively, Santa Barbara got about 8 inches of rain last year, when a normal year of rain is about 18 inches.

Third District Supervisor Doreen Farr, who represents the Santa Ynez Valley, an area hit particularly hard by the drought, said she took issue with placing the same restrictions on wells countywide.

“This is certainly a situation where one size does not fit all,” Farr said. “Our county is nothing if not diverse.”

Fifth District Supervisor Steve Lavagnino brought up the issue of water storage. He said even if Cachuma Lake were to fill up, it then would spill over and water would be lost.

First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal said a solution could be found somewhere in between doing nothing and enforcing a moratorium on all new wells.

“The fact of the matter is that we are in a water crisis,” Carbajal said. “I think we need to find what that lowest common denominator is without going to the extreme. I think there’s a number of things that can be done without going to the extreme moratorium, which mostly focuses on new wells. “

Also on Tuesday, the board got a preview of the county's 2015-16 budget, which is projected to see overall revenue of \$872.8 million, up 6.1 percent from the current year's \$823 million, according to a staff report.

Employee salaries, one of the main expenditures for the county, are projected to increase to an average of \$77,454 per employee for the 2015-16 fiscal year, a 2.1 percent increase from the current year's average salary of \$75,862.

The county will also have to tackle balancing the budgets for the Sheriff's Department and Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services. ADMHS and the Sheriff's Department have projected deficits of \$4.6 million and \$1.9 million respectively for the current 2014-15 fiscal year, according to the report.

Budget details will be hashed out during the board's annual budget workshops, which begin April 6. The budget will be finalized in June.

[http://lompocrecord.com/santamaria/county-delays-decision-on-water-well-moratorium/article\\_72b74e4e-3b9c-58ec-913b-f57e86219b2f.html](http://lompocrecord.com/santamaria/county-delays-decision-on-water-well-moratorium/article_72b74e4e-3b9c-58ec-913b-f57e86219b2f.html)

## **Lompoc Record: Safer streets for cyclists, pedestrians**

March 18, 2015 3:01 pm

Do you ride a bicycle? Do you walk around town? Do you feel like your streets are safe for bicyclists and pedestrians?

The state encourages cities and counties to make streets safer and more accessible so more people will choose to ride or walk as a transportation alternative.

The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) is in the middle of a planning process to bring together the plans created by Santa Barbara County and cities to create the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

SBCAG staff will hold a workshop Wednesday, March 25, from 6-7:30 p.m. at Casa Nueva, 260 N. San Antonio Road in Santa Barbara, to solicit input and feedback. They will talk about the planning process, conduct roundtable discussions to hear from the public, and answer questions.

The city of the future encourages people to walk and bike, to get out of their cars for their health, while reducing the need to expand roads. It creates safe places for children to walk or bike to school. It reduces pollution. It is good for business. It is friendlier. Many cities are improving their streets to make them safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

In Lompoc, some great crosswalks in the center of town help remind drivers to share the road and let pedestrians know roads belong to them, too. These crosswalks are brick-patterned and colored, also improving the look of the street. More of these would be great, as well as other types of painted or patterned crosswalks. Flashing lights might be appropriate at some mid-street crossings or other crossings that don't have traffic signals. Perhaps other improvements could help.

There are also some good places to bike in Lompoc — Cypress Avenue has wide bike lanes all the way from 7th Street to Ryon Park; there is a bike path across the river parallel to H Street; there are some other off-road bike paths.

There are some places where bike boulevards might be feasible, streets with low automobile traffic that could be enhanced for bicycle use with signage and bicycle stencils on the street that indicate the lane is to be shared with bicycles.

Perhaps there are places where cycle tracks could be installed. This involves placing a physical barrier along the side of the traffic lane that separates the bicycles from the vehicles. Perhaps, also, some colored bike lanes. These visually remind motorists to share the road with bicyclists.

In Buellton's Avenue of the Flags green stripes across the bike lanes show where cars can turn into driveways and crosshatched white stripes give a three-foot buffer between cars and bikes. Also, sensors could be installed at intersections to detect the presence of bicycles to change the lights.

The Highway 246 bridge over the Santa Ynez River has been identified as an accident waiting to happen. Mayor Bob Lingl urged SBCAG to find funding to alleviate the hazard. Other board members agreed it should be a priority.

If we want to see safer streets, we need to let our elected officials know this is important to us. If you can't attend, you can email comments to [mbecker@sbcag.org](mailto:mbecker@sbcag.org) no later than March 27.

At Santa Barbara County Action Network, we are getting together with others who are interested in making our streets safer. If you are interested in joining us, visit our website at [www.sbcan.org](http://www.sbcan.org) for more information.

[http://lompocrecord.com/news/opinion/editorial/commentary/forward-view/safer-streets-for-cyclists-pedestrians/article\\_e32a67a8-f885-556d-98fe-8f8aedeb86ba.html](http://lompocrecord.com/news/opinion/editorial/commentary/forward-view/safer-streets-for-cyclists-pedestrians/article_e32a67a8-f885-556d-98fe-8f8aedeb86ba.html)